REPORTS OF THE DEPARTMENT-RELATED PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PETROLEUM AND CHEMICALS

SHRI H. HANUMANTHAPPA (Karnataka): Madam, I lay on the Table, a copy each (in English and Hindi) of the following Reports of the Standing Committee on Petroleum and Chemicals:—

(i) Sixth Report on Action Taken by Government on the recommendations contained in Third Report on 'Demands for Grants (1996-97)' of Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

(ii) Seventh Report on Action Taken by Government on the recommendations contained in First Report on 'Demands for Grants (1996-97)' of Department of Chemicals and Petro-chemicals.

(iii) Eighth Report on Action Taken by Government on the recommendations contained in Second Report on 'Demands for Grants (1996-97)' of Department of Fertilisers.

REPORT AND MINUTES OF THE DEPARTMENT-RELATED PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS

SHRI GOPALSINH G. SOLANKI (Gujarat): Madam, I lay on the Table, a copy (in English and Hindi) of the Fifth Report and Minutes of the Department-Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways (1997-98) on 'Re-Organisation of Zonal Offices in Indian Railways'.

REPORTS OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

SHRI N. GIRI PRASAD (Andhra Pradesh): Madam, I lay on the Table, a copy each (in English and Hindi) of the following Reports of the Public Accounts Committee (Eleventh Lok Sabha):—

(1) Fourth Report and Minutes on Union Government Appropriation Accounts (1994-95)—(Telecommunication Services).

(2) Seventh Report on Action Taken on 72nd Report of Public Accounts Committee (10th Lok Sabha) on Janata Cloth Scheme.

MOTION FOR ELECTION TO THE INDIAN COUNCIL OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SOCIETY

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI CHATURANAN MISHRA): Madam, I beg to move:

That in pursuance of sub-rule (vii) of rule 4 read with rule 9 of the Rules of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research Society, this House do proceed to elect, in such manner as the Chairman may direct, two Members from among the Members of this House to be Members of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research Society.

The Question was put and the motion was adopted

MOTION FOR ELECTION TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE TUBERCULOSIS ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRI SALEEM IQBAL SHERVANI): Madam, I beg to move:

That in pursuance of Rule 3(vii) (b) of

the Memorandum of Association with Rules and Regulations and Bye-Laws of the Tuberculosis Association of India, this House do proceed to elect in such manner as the Chairman may direct, one Member from among the Members of this House to the Central Committee of the Tuberculosis Association of India, in the vacancy caused by the retirement of Shrimati Vidya Beniwal from the membership of the Rajya Sabha on 9th April, 1996.

The question was put and the motion was adopted.

THE BUDGET (GENERAL), 1997-98

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Now, the Minister will reply to the Budget discussion.

How much time will you take, Mr. Minister?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): About 45 minutes or 50 minutes.

SHRI AJIT P.K. JOGI (Madhya Pradesh): No interruptions.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: There will be no interruptions.

SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM: Madam Deputy Chairman, I am deeply grateful to the hon. Members who have participated in this debate on the Budget.

It is my privilege to reply to the debate this year first in the Rajya Sabha and later on today in the Lok Sabha. I believe there was a precedent for this in 1994. In a way, we just treat the two Houses equally. We present the Budget there, but we reply to the debate here first.

I am also grateful to the hon. Members for very high level of the debate, to the leaders of various political parties and to those who spoke in the debate for rising above partisan considerations, for welcoming what they found were positive aspects in the Budget, for criticising, as they should, what they found were aspects which required to be reconsidered and for raising a number of questions which I am bound to answer. But, if I may say with respect, the debate this year, compared to that in previous years, clearly underscores the point that this Budget has been generally well received throughout the country, and, as representatives of the people, those assembled here are reflecting the fact that the people have, by and large, accepted this Budget as one serving the objectives which were set before this Government while framing the Budget.

Madam, there will be another occasion when we will discuss the Finance Bill. So, I do not want to use my time today to reply to specific issues raised about the taxation proposals, specific excise duties or specific customs duties because there will be another occasion, and on that occasion we can deal with many of these grievances and doubts. In fact, the recess period will give an opportunity to my Ministry to examine the various post-Budget representations. But, I can tell you that the number of post-Budget representations received this year, I believe, has been the lowest in many years. We will use this month to discuss the post-Budget representations, and we will have satisfactory answers to everyone who has raised doubts regarding items ranging from umbrellas to C.R. coils. So, I wish to leave all those issues out for the time being.

Let me deal with the general philosophy behind this Budget and the general economic situation. Madam, on more than one occasion I have said that I am building on an economy which has gained muscle and strength in the last five years. There is no gainsaying the fact that the economy which grew by an average of 7 per cent in 1994-95 and 1995-96, does give the new Government a solid basis, on which it can build its policies. Seven per cent growth is not a mean achievement. I would urge hon.